BULLETIN
of the
Connecticut Historical Society

Volume 10 *Hartford, April, 1944* *Number 3*

SHAD BOAT AND CAPSTAN
(modern)

The Connecticut River Shad Fishing Piers

Recently there came to light some old records of two of the fishing companies which operated fishing piers near the mouth of the Connecticut River a hundred years ago. These companies are a forgotten feature of Connecticut commerce. The remains of the piers still appear on the navigation charts as a hazard to the sailor who strays from the river channel, but how they were operated seems to be unknown to the present generation.

Shad fishing was operated in three different ways. Outside the mouth of the river, and where they could be set without interfering with navigation, pound nets or fish traps were set. In the river, from Saybrook to Essex, seine nets were hauled from the piers referred to, while later the use of drift nets from drag boats came in.

The accounts of the two companies give us at least an outline of the season's operations. First the companies seem to have been a form of co-operative enterprise. Nets and labor do not appear on the accounts and possibly the owners each furnished a section of the seine and his labor for the operation of them. Each company was divided into twelve shares which were bought and sold, and for convenience were further divided into twenty-fourths. Shares in the companies recorded here sold from two hundred to four hundred dollars.

In an account of shad fishing written by Hon. E. Hart Fenn of Wethersfield in the Hartford Times of December 6, 1919, he mentions four piers on the east side of the river, all below the present bridges, and twelve on the west side, beginning just above Fenwick and running almost to Essex. Let us list them, for the names are interesting and suggestive of the times. Running from south to north they are as follows: On the east,—Griswold's, Sodom, Dickerson's, Gibralter. On the west,—Folly, Wreck, Fort Reach, Parsonage, Jefferson, Washington, Madison, St. Croix, New Foundland, Ayers Point, Watrous Rocks, and, lastly, Gridlings Rocks, off Haydens Point just below Essex.

Our accounts are of the New Foundland and St. Croix piers or rather "Companies" and William Bull appears to have been the leader in both. He had at least nine and three-quarters shares in the first and two and one-twelfth in the latter. He kept the accounts, and from the receipted bills we get the following outline of a season's operations.

Early in April someone is paid to inspect the pier and see what damage has been done by the winter storms. An unusual visit of this kind was made in November 1830, which might indicate a storm of unusual violence at that time. The piers were built at the edge of the deep water channel and were probably merely rubble heaps built up to or above the high-water level. If damage had been suffered, flat boats were hired and stone ferried out to repair the damage. On the stone pier a wooden platform was built, large enough to draw the seines from, and a capstan erected, for the hauling of a long seine in the swift current took more than mere manpower. On shore, too, work was begun. The seines were collected, tarred and knitted together. Corks and leads, if missing, were replaced, as well as worn lines. New buoys were made and the boats were repaired and caulked. One year two new boats, 25 feet long, were bought for $64.50 for the two. On several occasions fairly large purchases of twine were made and distributed to the owners, so we may assume that they put in their spare time in the winter knitting new nets. Oars were bought by the foot, "51 ft. at 6¢ per foot." Repairs were made to the fish houses, for each pier had one or more of these on shore nearby to store the equipment and to pack the shad. As the season approached, all of this equipment was hauled to the fishing place and made ready. Apparently, a considerable part of the catch was salted, for salt and barrels were frequent items, and an occasional bit of cooperage. One paper relates to a suit against the cooper who is accused of substituting poor barrels for those selected, with the result that the brine ran out and the fish spoiled, with grievous damage.

Of the actual fishing the accounts show nothing. Undoubtedly the procedure was the traditional drawing of the nets, except that it was done from the pier instead of the shore. The net would be loaded into the boat and paid out as the boat was rowed across the channel in a large sweep. The lines would be brought to the capstan and the tedious grind of winding in the seine would commence. This was a night job for it is then that the fish make their way upstream seeking their spawning grounds. Both companies recognized the labor this entailed if the night was stormy and cold, for among the annual bills were those for "rum and burned sugar" for drinking. Gin, too, at 50¢ per gallon was supplied with some generosity.

As always in fishing, the catch varied, sometimes thirty and once, on the only record shown, over one thousand. The total catch at St. Croix in 1817 was over ten thousand. Mr. Fenn records similar catches at the Parsonage pier some thirty years later with recorded averages about 1850 of 19,490. This was after the construction of the Holyoke dam which prevented the shad from going up to their accustomed spawning grounds in the upper river. From this time on, because of the dam, the catches rapidly diminished and by 1870 were so small that the pier fishing was abandoned.

By mid June the run was over. The equipment was taken ashore, the platform and capstan dismantled, and all put in storage for the next season. One last activity remained,—the annual meeting, where the expenses were reported and presumably the profits divided. In July of 1829, Heman Starkey did not get his notice in time and sent a note saying that "I had five hands at work for me today & considerable hay to get in &c and wish to be excused from attending. You can direct me to pay my share of expenses any where you please & it shall be paid on demand."

As the total expense ran under two hundred dollars a year, for the regular charge for labor was one dollar a day, the returns from 10,000 shad at from ten to fifteen cents apiece must have brought in a nice income to the owners at a time when their usual farm activities were not yet at their summer height.

While this form of fishing is a thing of the past, the piers still remain and some may be seen on the extra low tides of the spring and fall.

ANONYMOUSLY CONTRIBUTED.

NEWS OF THE SOCIETY

"Benedict Arnold and the Groton Massacre" was the title of a paper read at the January meeting by Charles Rufus Harte, of New Haven. The reader traced Arnold's career in detail, stressing his ability to make enemies who were continually seeking his downfall, and holding the view that his attack on the fort at Groton had no effect on the Revolution as a whole except to arouse greater anger against the British.

Irwin A. Buell, Ph.D., of Trinity College, gave a talk at the February

meeting on "Horace Wells and the Discovery of Anesthesia". Dr. Buell stressed the fact that this year marks the hundredth anniversary of Wells's great discovery, and he spoke of proposed celebrations in honor of the event to be held later in the year.

At the March meeting a paper entitled "Connecticut and the Constitution" was read by James E. Rhodes, 2nd, of Hartford. Events leading to the Constitutional Convention of 1787 and the characters of Connecticut's delegates were sketched briefly, and special prominence was given to the part played by this State in framing the Constitution as it now stands.

Barkhamsted Church Records

(Continued from Vol. 10, page 16)

	May 19—	Japhet Case husband to Mrs. Case.
	May—	An infant child of Mr. Gridly and wife.
	Oct. —	A child of Naaman Phelps and wife.
	Nov.	Doctor Farnum.
1810	Feb. 7—	An infant child of Manna Case and wife.
	Apr. 2—	Daniel Hitchcock husband of Mrs Ursula Hitchcock.
	Sept —	Two infant children of Samuel Merrit Jr. and his wife.
1811	June 15—	An infant child of Reuben Munson and wife.
	Aug. 29—	An infant child of John Mack and his wife.
	Sept. 3—	James Stuard son of Alexander Stuard.
1812	Jan. ——	The widow Lidia Clinton of a consumption.
	Feb. ———	An infant child of Peter Barber and wife.
	Feb. ———	An infant child of Pelatiah Random and wife.
	Apr. 19—	Mr. James Slaid aged 82.
	Apr. 23—	Widow Mary Parker aged 81.
	June 17—	Mr. John Ives aged 85.
	Aug. 30—	Coll[n] Israel Jones aged 39 or *(59)*.
	Dec. 30	Richard Case the 3rd in the 37 year of age.
1813	Mar. 15—	Gideon Mills in 63 year.
	Apr. 28—	Mary Merrills aged 78.
	May 19—	Harmon Leroi Jones son to Silvester Jones and wife.
	May 20—	Phebe Case daughter of Capt Humphrey Case and wife.
	May 25—	Rev. Ozias Eells in the 58 year of his age.
	May 30—	A infant child of John Pike and his wife.
	June 1—	Widow Ruth Taylor aged 91.
	June 2—	Mrs. Nancy Taylor the wife of William Taylor Jr. aged 28.
	June 5—	Elam Jones son of Maneus Jones in the 4th year of his age.
	June 10—	Mr. Philander Wilcox aged 64 years.
	July 24—	An infant child of Zabad Case and wife aged 18 mos.

	Aug. 30—	Eprain Barber in the 61 year of his age.
	Aug. 26—	Dudley Merit son of Oliver Merit and his wife in the 5th year of his age.
	Oct. 15—	An infant child of John Dick and wife.
	Nov. 4—	Katharine Johnson the wife of Sherburn Johnson in the 82 year of her age.
	Nov. 18—	Widow Lois Jones age 49.
1814	Jan. 4—	Anson Barnes son of A[l]anson Barnes and wife aged 3 years.
	Jan. 20—	Allen Mills son of Thadeus Mills and Sally His wife age 3 years 3 months.
	Jan. 23—	Mrs Mary Payne in 72th year having survived four husbands the last of whom was Mr. William Payne of New Hartford.
	Feb. 7—	Died a child of Freeman Merrit and Wife aged 9 months.
	Feb. 9—	Mrs. Mahitabel Wead at the house of Mr. David Lee in 85 year.
	Feb. 10—	A child of Mr. Tracy Cannon age 2 weeks.
	Feb. 16—	Mr. Ephraim Fox aged 64.
	Mar. 3—	Mr. Peniel Tuttle son of Mr. Charles Tuttle and Rosetta his wife of the prevailing fever at Winsted at house of Mr. Benedict in 22nd year. Buried in Barkhamsted.
	Apr. 9—	Mr. Samuel Pike in 91st year.
	Apr. 12—	Mr. Thomas Spencer aged 64 years.
	Apr. 27—	Mrs. Huldah Phelps wife of Mr Abijah Phelps aged 73 yrs.
	May 29	Mr. James Merrit aged 29 years.
	July 15—	Mrs. Lois Ives aged 85.
	July 26—	Eliza Case about 6 years child of widow Case.
	Dec. 5—	Child of Mr Elijajah Cannon.
1815	Feb. 11—	An infant child of Norman Wilcox and his wife aged
	Feb. 15—	Rebecca Laura child of Norman Wilcox and his wife aged 6 years.
	May 21—	Pelitiah Allyn Esq. aged 60.
	May 27—	Mrs. Elizabeth Lee.
	June 9—	A child of Eden Taylor.
	June 20—	Rebecca D. Forester (Jonston).
	June 23—	Hannah Munson wife of Ephrain Munson aged 66.
	June 24—	Ezra Case aged 68.
	July	Garry Segar.
	July 25—	Mrs. Dorcas Perry. 17
	Nov. 7—	Unitica Steward child of Alexander Steward age 1
	Dec. 18—	The widow Elizah Preston age 84.
1816	Jan. 3—	Deacon Joseph Wilder age 91
	Jan. 12—	Child of S. Jones age 4.

1815	Dec. 31—	A child of Mr. Hawkins Hart, named Fanny.
1816	Apr. 8—	Miss Rebecca Pike age 61
	Apr. 19—	Mrs. Lydia Mack wife of Mr. Ezra Mack aged 66 years.
	May 4—	Mrs. Mahitable Case wife of Mr. Ezra Case aged 64 years.
	May 14—	Juniun Mills son of Doct. Oliver Mills and Amelis his wife age 1 year, 7 mos., 14 days.
	July 18—	Mr Aaron Phelps aged 54.
	July 31—	Mr Nathaniel Ives aged 65.
1817	Mar.	Truman Walling son to Truman Walling and wife 7 years.
	May	An infant child of Joseph Elwell and wife age 3 hours.
	May 19—	Marlin Willson son of William Willson and wife 18 yrs.
	June 2—	Mr William Mitchelson aged 72 years.
	July 24—	Rebeckah Taylor wife of Abner Taylor age 84.
	Aug. 29—	Mrs. Naomi Humphrey mother to Mr Solomon Humphrey and Augustus Humphrey aged 90 years.
	Sept. 21—	Abigail daughter of Asahel Phelps and wife aged 2 years and 2 months.
1818	Mar 21—	Mrs Lucritia Munson 2nd wife of Mr. Medad Munson age 58.
	Apr. 7—	Mr. Ephrain Tiffany aged 59 years.
	Apr. 30—	Mrs. Achsah Rose age 93.
	May 12—	Mr Whitehead Howd age 75 years.
	June 7—	Mrs. Ruth Hart 3 months and 1 day after her husband in her 61st year.
	June	Rosilla Barber daughter of Ephrain age 23.
	Sept. 2—	Lucy Johnson daughter of Mr. Sherburn Johnson.
	Oct.	Lucy Merritt wife of Samuel Merritt Jr. aged 39.
	Dec. 26—	Mrs Elizah Phelps wife of Mr Abijah Phelps.
1819	Jan 2—	Mr. Simeon Case 2nd aged 57 years.
	Feb. 9—	An infant of Virgil Taylor and Electa his wife age eleven weeks.
	Jan. 4—	An infant of Theodore Newel and wife age 5 Mos.
	Mar. 17—	A child of Guilford Allen age about 2 years.
	Mar. 30—	Chloe Alfred aged 20 years.
	June 18—	Mr. Mack aged.
	July 29—	An infant of Lucy Alfred day of its birth.
	Nov. 25—	Lois Ives daughter of John Ives age 25.
	Nov. 27—	Child of Lyman Hoskins day of its birth.
	Dec. 3—	Wife of Mr. Eliphalet Case age 46.
		May the wife of Nahum Barber.
1820	Jan.	Alvin Barber age 30.

	Feb.	A child of Mr. Peters.
	Mar. 6—	A child of Mr Spencer aged 21 years.
	Jan.	A child of Augustus Humphrey still born.
	Mar. 25—	A child of Lyman Burwell age 5 years.
	July	Miriam Barber age 24.
	July	Mr. Rockwell aged 78.
	Aug. 2—	A child of Lorin Sexton still born.
	Nov.—	Mr. Walling who was drowned.
1821	Jan. 12—	Mosses Gains aged 86.
	Jan. 12—	An infant of Chauncy Griswold still born.
	Jan. 27—	Cephan Ford aged 62.
	Apr. 12—	Wife of David Beach age 56.
	Apr. 22—	Mr. Gilbert age 92.
	June 29—	Benjamin Jones age 64.
	June 23—	at Cornelsville in Pa. William Shepherd of this place age 36 years.
	July 28—	Silas Howess age 9 years.
	Aug. 4—	The wife of Abiel Case age 29 years.
	Sept 7—	A child of Enoch Burwell age 8 Mos.
	Sept. 8—	Simeon Messenger age 79.
	Sept. 23—	Lura Johnson age 50.
	Dec. 3—	David Beach aged 80.
	Dec. 14—	A child of Guilford Allen aged 2.
	Dec. 15—	The wife ———— 16.
1822	Jan.	The wife of David Squirs aged.
	Feb. 5&6—	The children of Hawkins Hart Jr. Betsey aged 12 and a child aged 1 year.
	Apr.	Elihu Rici age 36 years.
	May 6—	Simeon Rogers aged 77.
	May 7—	Mrs. Ruth Wilcox aged.
	Apr.	An infant of Enoch Gains still born.
	July	Mr. James Mirit.
	Aug. 7—	Eunetia Sexton wife of Lorin Sexton aged 33.
	Sept.	Mr. Crow one of the town poor originally from Hartford aged about 87.
	Nov.	The widow Mills aged.
	Nov. 22—	A child of Samuel Mirit Jr. age 14.
	Nov. 25—	A child of Eliasaph Rici age 15 months.
	Dec.	A child of Capt. Asabel Phelps ——13.
1823	Mar.	A child of Anson Barnes age 2 years.
	Apr. 8—	Capt. Alvin Squires age 38.
	May	Dillon Case age 25.
	July	James Pike age 70.
	Sept. 5—	Arbea Alfred aged 56.
	Dec.	The wife of Capt. Zophar Case.
	May	The wife of John Merrils.
	May	A child of Bela Squires still born.
	May 1—	——Case son of Mr Abed Case age 17.
	Sept. 9—	Mr. Gad Bliss aged 64.
1824	Jan. 6—	Child of Linus Bliss age 4 days.

	Jan. 26—	Child of Sherlock Munson age 17 mos.
	Apr.	Child of Orville Howd 1 year.
	Feb.	Child of Seth Barber age 3 mos.
	May	Wife of Seth Barber.
	May 25—	Wife of Stephen Kibby.
	June 1—	Mr. Alexander Case.
	June	The wife of Timothy Ensign age 28.
	July	Rhoda Jones child of Col. Jones age 6 years.
	Oct. 4—	Child of Chester Slade age 5 Mos.
	Sept.	Mr. Cannon aged 80.
	Oct. 22	Stuben Taylor aged 29 Prof. of minerology in Brown University.
	Dec. 19—	The widow of Eprain Tiffany age 67.
	Dec. 24—	The wife of William More aged.
	Dec. 25—	A child of Mr. Marshall age 5 mos.
	May	Mr. Hawkins Hart age 84.
	Nov.	Abner Taylor age 68.
1825	Jan. 8—	The wife of Lyman Slade age 35.
	Jan.	Child of Amy Case age 2 years.
	Jan.	Eveline Jones age 24.
	Mar.	A child of Lyman Haskins.
	Apr. 7—	Deacon Aaron Allyn age 74.
	Apr. 20—	Mrs. Humphrey wife of Solomon Humphrey aged 66.
	Apr. 26—	Mrs. Slade age 66.
	July	John Whiting.
		Mrs. Merit the widow of James Merit.
		The widow Rockwell.
		A child of Mr. Noah Carter aged 4.
	Dec.	A child of Mr. Hawkins Hart age 3 mos.
1826	Jan.	An infant of Harlo Case
		A child of Joel Allyn.
		Mr. Ephrain Munson Age 70.
		Widow Case aged 80.
		Child of Mr. Brown age 6 years.
		Mr. Wilson.
	Feb.	A child of the widow Alexander Case 6 years.
	Mar. 11—	Mr. Thomas age 86.
	Mar. 19—	A child of Jabin Frost age 2 years.
	Apr. 26—	Widow Mary Messenger age 85.
	July	Child of Mr. Russel Munson age 4.
	Aug.	Mrs. Hannah Merrils age 35.
		Mr. Isiah Tuttle. A child of Marcus Rose.
	Dec. 2—	A child of George Merrils age 5 mos.
	Dec. 7—	Ephrain Musnon age 25.
	Dec. 29—	A child of Sylvester Jones age 8 years killed.

(To be continued)

The price of these Bulletins is ten cents each.